

622 the matter. The mayor was happily married to an attractive wife,
159 who dressed *po modata* (in the latest fashion) and kept her children
so neat and proper that they contrasted vividly with the peasant
urchins who ran up and down the unpaved streets.

625 The mayor was charged with maintaining law and order with
159 the help of the *strazhar* (police officer), the field policeman, and
622 the forest policeman. The second wandered from field to field to
see that cattle did not stray unattended onto strips where there were
growing crops; the forest policeman prevented the purloining of
wood from the forest lands used by Dragalevtsy people. The mayor
also acted as local justice of the peace, and was ex officio member
of the school board, health board, and any other village organization
he considered worthy of serious attention.

793 But the mayor, although he enjoyed the spotlight, had to share
622 it with the village priest. For five centuries, while the Bulgarians
were subject to the Turks, the priest was often the only person in a
village with any formal education. He not only interpreted the laws
of God, but the laws of man as well. The Bulgarian monks and
priests helped keep the feeling of Bulgarian nationality alive during
those dark days, and thereby eventually aided in the achievement of
national independence in 1878 at the conclusion of the Russo-Turkish
War. Since traditions die slowly in a Bulgarian village, the position
of the priest is still very high, although few people attend religious
services and fewer people observe the rather rigid fasts of the Eastern
Orthodox Church. However, the priest is an essential officiant at
christenings, weddings, and funerals. Without him the peasants have
no way of meeting life's major crises.

159 Father Sava was the *sveshtennik* or priest in Dragalevtsy. He
793 wore with dignity his long black gown and high brimless hat, his
uncut red hair in a knot at the back of his head, and a long auburn
beard. I never failed to marvel at his wide range of interests. One
day we would poke around his beehives; the next day he would show
me his favorite photographs and competently discuss the relative
merits of American and German cameras. But it was after I learned
of the man's romance that I began to see him in a clearer light. The
young lady whom he wanted to marry was the daughter of a priest

THE PEOPLE AND THEIR VILLAGE

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who flatly decreed that his daughter could marry no one but a priest. (Not only are priests well provided for financially, but they can marry only once. This means that they supposedly take exceptionally good care of their mates.) Sava had already completed the commercial gymnasium, had studied for two years in a school for leaders of co-operatives, and planned to attend the university. In order to comply with the demands of his sweetheart's father, however, he interrupted his educational plans long enough to prepare himself for the ecclesiastical examinations, which he passed with credit. He was then assigned to the Dragalevtsy parish. Meanwhile he had married the young lady of his choice. Soon thereafter he obtained leave of absence from his church responsibility in order to complete his work in Finance at the Svoboden (Private) University in Sofia. He was highly respected by the people whom he shepherded and was vitally interested in their welfare.

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There were often two or three kibitzers while the intelligentsia played cards. These were lesser officials interested in advancement, or well-to-do peasants who wanted to hobnob with the controlling group. None of these hangers-on had been westernized to the point of wearing a tie, and some of them still wore the heelless, pointed pigskin sandals.

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Oddly enough for a Bulgarian village, the veterinarian and physician were both women, who constantly found the patriarchal traditions stumbling blocks to the winning of village support. The medical doctor was a Russian who had spent part of her childhood in San Francisco, but returned to the University of Petrograd for her medical training. After the Revolution she left Russia with her family.

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The only other "educated" people in the village were the teachers, eight in number, selected for their posts by outside school authorities rather than by the villagers themselves. Four of the eight had been born outside the pre-Hitler boundaries of Bulgaria, in territories which irredentist Bulgarians sought to recover permanently. Maria, for example, was from Dobruja, which was then a part of Rumania; Anna and Georgi were born in parts of Macedonia which

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CHAPTER V

THE COURTSHIP AND WEDDING

WHENEVER I asked a man or a woman "How did you come to marry?" the response was always the same. After an embarrassed laugh, the person would say, "Oh, it's so long ago. I have forgotten. I have not had time to remember such foolish things." Then would come a quick look at me from dark eyes that never seemed to lose their brilliance even when the broad face was sagging, deeply lined with the years. "You really want to know?" First it came haltingly; then soon the man would drop the harness he was mending or the woman would lay aside her distaff to give undivided attention to the story. I needed to do little prompting. My interruptions were usually questions about attitudes toward courtship or marriage in general.

There was never any self-pity, even among those women who had been stolen. Even for them something bright had flashed across their days. And for all—"It was so long ago, I thought I had forgotten. There has been much work." From all their reminiscences, stripped of their meager romance, there emerged the village conception of marriage.

Marriage was expected of young people in Dragalevtsy and was an affair which they usually handled in a matter-of-fact way. The peasant youth did not trouble himself as to whether he should or should not marry. He simply concerned himself, sometimes much and sometimes little, about whom to marry.

A woman who had not married by her twenty-fifth year was considered an old maid. People began to wag their heads and ask: "Why doesn't Vesela marry? She's a nice looking girl. There must be something wrong with her about which we do not know." As a matter of fact, in 1937 there was only one peasant girl over twenty-five un-

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582 married in Dragalevtsy. Because she had a physical deformity her
 208 parents had given up all hope of marrying her off since they knew
 she would be unable to attend properly to her housework and field
 work. During the first World War there were two old maids in
 the village who had not been chosen for marriage because each of
 them had a goiter. A doctor with the German forces cured the goiters
 [554] and these two unmarried women became desirable prospects, one of
 them marrying a priest's son in Sofia, one of the highest prizes a
 village girl could capture in her matrimonial venture.

[508] Since public opinion made life miserable for unmarried women,
 [562] even a girl of independent temperament looked upon marriage as
 an inevitable event, especially if she stayed in the village. With men it
 was different. They could choose to remain unmarried and not lose
 581 prestige in the community. People only said: "Well, Asen simply
 doesn't want to marry. He's a bit shy of skirts, you know."

The young men to whom I talked were outspoken in regard to
 those qualities which they looked for in choosing a mate: good health,
 industry, efficiency in the house and field, and proper care of the
 person. The girls, on the other hand, had little to say regarding the
 qualities they wanted in a husband. They seemed willing to accept
 whatever luck brought them. But marry they must.

584 There were many ways in which the husbands and wives had
 574 become acquainted with each other. If both had been born in
 883 Dragalevtsy, as was the case with a little more than half the couples,
 they were already aware of the other's characteristics either through
 personal acquaintance or hearsay. Many of the married couples had
 played together as children while tending the cattle in the sun-drenched
 pastures, only to become distant until most of the adolescent period
 passed. Then began frequent meetings at the fountain at sunset, shy
 flirtation at the *horo* and *sedenki*, or rambling conversation on the
 way to and from the Friday market. At the *sedenki*, held by the young
 people in various girls' homes on winter evenings, games involving
 forfeits were played. At one *sedenka* I attended, the girl giving out
 the penalties sent a couple obviously in love to the dark outdoors
 "to see what the weather was like." A few minutes later she sent
 a second couple out to see where the first had gone. All four of the

COURTSHIP AND WEDDING

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threes, and fours passed village girls locked arm in arm; appropriate (and inappropriate) comments were made as they passed. Up and down they went, greeting each other again and again, joking, blushing, laughing heartily, each wondering at the impression made upon some favorite member of the opposite sex.

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These modern ways contrasted sharply with the laconic statements of those villagers who had married many years ago.

"When we grew older we began to know each other more intimately and went together for two or three years."

"We were neighbors before marriage. We met every holiday at the *boro* and in the evenings at the fountain. Our wedding festivities lasted three days."

"My wife and I knew one another as children. Outsiders urged both of us to marry, so I stole her. She would not agree to marry me until after I had stolen her."

Often the relatives of the couple involved kept saying that it would be a good thing to have the two persons married, and thus brought about a match they considered advantageous.

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In Dragalevtsy human nature asserted itself in universal forms; for example, a village Lothario boasted:

"I had had thirty-five girls, and had gone 'hand-in-hand' with one for two years. But I fell in love with my wife because she was modest and had not talked to boys."

I might add here that the parents of the girl objected to the match, but only because she was taller than her suitor.

Two-fifths of the Dragalevtsy-born men, in their search for a wife, preferred the novelty that other villages afforded. More often than not a Bulgarian youth would all of a sudden get a fixed idea in his mind, "I've got to get a wife." The search was then under way. In such a state of mind the young man was not apt to wander far. The villages in their order of popularity were Boyana, Simeonovo, and Bistritsa. Only two other villages had more than four representatives among the married women. These likewise were not far away. It was significant that no man born in Dragalevtsy and currently living there had a wife born in Sofia. This meant that if a Sofia-

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- 581 born girl should marry a Dragalevtsy boy, she would make him get a job in Sofia and would not return with him to village life.

When a husband and wife born in different villages told their stories I once more began to believe in the improbable. These are typical accounts:

"I went to Kumaritsa to carry my sister's things since her husband was working at the railroad station. We stopped at a house where a niece was living with her uncle. When she heard that people from another village were at her house, she returned and found that she liked me and I liked her. We were both seventeen. Half a year later we married, during which time I came to see her only once. That means we had seen each other twice before we married."

"I met my wife when she was with her father selling onions near the Sofia *Obshtina*. This was on a Friday; the next day I went to get her from her village the other side of Sofia; the following day we were married in Dragalevtsy. The father agreed to this for I seemed to be her destiny."

- 584 The choice of a mate was not just an individual decision in Dragalevtsy, for the pressure on the part of relatives was steady and occasionally severe. At times the young people rebelled at this guidance but generally acquiesced, largely because they were so economically dependent upon their families. There were no professional matchmakers. In their stead some interested relative would take a hand at getting a daughter married off by seeing that a fitting young man was made conscious of the young woman's qualifications. This was often done so skillfully that the young man thought he had discovered the girl himself. In the 1930's the choice had to seem to originate with the young people, and there were few cases of families forcing their children into a marriage.

- 583 There were times when girls did marry against their will, but this was not because of parental command. These cases occurred when the bride was stolen without her consent. The actual stealing usually took place in the evening or late afternoon when the young man, assisted by companions, carried the girl from the fountain or the *boro* to his home. The girl's father was supposed immediately to hurry to the boy's home to ask if his daughter was willing to stay. The girl

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE

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THE BULGARIAN groom settled down naturally into the role of the married man as the embarrassment of the first few days of good-natured joshing wore away. He took less and less interest in the Sunday afternoon promenade, preferring to sit in front of the tavern with the other married men where he liked to be complimented on the woman he had chosen in the same way that he would appreciate compliments on a cow just bought. However, as marriage progressed he began to respect his wife as a person rather than as a possession.

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It was when the first child arrived, in a year or so, that the husband suddenly felt a sense of tremendous importance. He was no longer just a married man; he was a father. Though the beginning of married life had little effect upon his behavior, the fact of parenthood changed even his facial expression, his earnestness in his work, and his whole attitude toward the future. I sensed this often in the requests that people made for photographs. Few young men came to ask for pictures of their brides; but many wanted pictures of their infants, especially of the sons. In the case of the first child they would hold him up squarely in front of the camera so that he would fill up the whole picture if possible. But as children continued to arrive year after year, the fathers often asked, "Could we get our new oxen into the picture too?"

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Most of the men accepted marriage as they did the weather: inevitable, sometimes balmy and sometimes disagreeable, but utterly essential. They did not go out of their way particularly to adjust themselves to marriage, and spoke little of marriage. They patiently waited for parenthood, which was revolutionary in its effect upon them.

MARRIAGE

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With women it was quite different, since marriage for them called for major adjustments. Not only did the wife have to become accustomed to the demands and habits of her husband, but she also had to fit into the routine of her husband's parental home. In some cases she had to subordinate herself to other daughters-in-law in the household. Should she and her husband live in a separate dwelling near the husband's childhood homestead, she still was so subject to the scrutiny of the in-laws that she found it expedient to conform to their ways of doing things.

The woman, much more than the man, had to give up the companionship of her former friends to move in the group of the married women of the neighborhood. In these groups she was initiated into much of the folklore about anatomy, conception, childbirth, and child care. The frank discussion by various women of their personal experiences was enough to make any squeamish girl terrified at the very thought of becoming a mother. Continued discussion, however, made the experience eventually seem less of an ordeal; in fact, it was often a source of comfort and encouragement when her time arrived.

These neighborhood gossiping groups did much more than shock the girl into some of the realities of married life; they also informed her of the personal peculiarities of her in-laws and neighbors; they let her know what she should and should not do. And if she was one of the first of her circle of friends to marry, she could look forward to the day when one or two of them would become brides in the vicinity and could join her in the company of these older married women.

The role of these women's groups in the village was interesting and far more important than the surface informality would indicate. Recreation for the older women was generally tied up with work. Distinctions, however, should be made between the women's work groups, such as those for spinning and carding, and women's gossiping groups, in spite of the fact that the membership was the same in both groups and that gossiping was the chief recreation in both instances. In the work groups, the women were invited formally by the hostess, were fed, and were expected to stay most of the day, definitely to work. Gossiping groups, however, were much more informal, since people

562 "Suppose you wanted to go to market some Friday and your
181 husband thought you ought not to go, what would you do?"

593 Not a single wife would dare go to market under these circumstances. Two or three said, "I wouldn't even start for the door."

"But suppose you wanted to make some small purchases in the city and your husband disapproved, what would you do?" Only two daring ones out of the thirty said they would make these purchases if they had money.

It paid the women to "behave," because the husband did have the right to beat a disrespectful wife. I never happened upon a wife-beating, but the fact that a few husbands told me with pride, "I never beat my wife," showed me that they considered themselves exceptional.

[208] A wife who received rough treatment, especially if her husband
562 had been drinking, could go to her father's home. She could not stay
593 there very long after her mate had become sober, because her father and the village in general made her feel that her place was with her husband no matter how disagreeable he might be. Usually she waited until her husband came with a meek promise of good behavior to ask her to come back.

In those formal ways a village wife showed respect to her husband. She did not, most of the time, find them burdensome because she knew nothing else. All of her experiences from childhood to marriage had conditioned her to a subordinate role. Should any woman
[208] have tried to rebel against her lot other women would have been her most vigorous critics. They, more than the men, aided in the perpetuation of the existing order.

562 The woman, however, had a far more important place than the
581 social amenities would indicate. Men frankly admitted that they
593 could not make a living without their wives. This feeling of dependence overshadowed the traditional masculine superiority to the extent that a partnership resulted. The man, to be sure, was the senior partner, but he knew that he was a member of a team in which co-operation was essential.

This deeper sense of partnership was best shown by the practice husbands had of consulting their wives on every matter of importance as well as on minor matters. Out of twenty-six representative cases,

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nineteen husbands always consulted their wives before doing anything such as selling a calf, hiring a servant, or building a small stable; four husbands consulted sometimes, and only three were so strong-willed and dominating that they never asked their wives' opinions. Many husbands said that their wives knew more than they did about the management of the farm, though these same wives modestly asserted that they knew very little. One man said: "That's why we are married: to ask each other." Quite a few husbands, having learned that it paid in the long run to consult the women, betrayed this by saying, "We have to ask," or "We have to listen to women."

Consulting, however, was not always the same as catering to the wives' wishes. I asked twenty-six husbands: "Suppose you had set your heart on buying something but your wife objected, what would you do?" Twelve said they would make the purchase anyway, three hedged a little in their answers, but eleven would buy nothing contrary to the wishes of their wives. This last group of eleven showed that to many men the judgment or wishes of the women meant far more than one would expect in "a man's country."

Much of a woman's hold upon her husband came about quite unconsciously on the part of either. The village wife was artless and ignorant of the wiles of a sophisticated society, but she knew that as long as she was efficient, decorous, and dutiful she could count upon continued support from her husband. She also knew that she was not in competition with adventuresses or with women, jaded and disappointed, frantically seeking excitement to enliven their days. Instead, the Dragalevtsy woman felt secure. With her there was a solemn finality about marriage to which her husband and others in the village subscribed.

She expected no courteous gestures or terms of endearment from her husband. Her name sufficed. Only three couples out of twenty-seven used affectionate names for each other, these taking such forms as *bulka* (bride), *baba* (old woman), and the like, but never *dear*, *darling*, or *sweetheart*. One of the three men who used such names saved them for times when his wife did not listen, and then he used several to get her attention. The occidental practice of kissing was little used by the married couples, though the younger generation was

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beginning to imitate "the people of the world" in this respect. As the psychological aspect of the sexual relationship between husband and wife varied with each couple, no generalization could be made except to point out that sex seemed to be a concomitant of marriage rather than the basis of marriage. Mates were picked by young men more for their potentialities as hard-working farm hands than for their sexual attractiveness. Quite often before marriage a sort of affection had grown up between the couple; more often affection came after marriage and increased as the partnership proved successful and the feeling of mutual dependence deepened.

Most of these couples freely, sometimes jokingly, admitted that they quarreled more or less, even when they were in many respects fortunately adjusted to each other. Nevertheless, in only one-third of the cases did this quarreling lead to a permanent cause of conflict.

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The disciplining of children by the husband frequently aroused the wife to indignation, but perhaps not to such a depth as did his late arrival from the tavern in an intoxicated condition. Few Bulgarian men drank to get drunk. Intoxication, when it came, was often the result of overenthusiastic observance of drinking customs. For instance, when men drank in the saloon all of them ordered drink and food not only for themselves but for the whole table, everybody paying for what he had ordered before leaving; the people always toasted health, long life, or happiness when they raised a glass of wine, beer, or whisky, at home, in the tavern, or in the field; at feasts *rakiya* was served before the people began to eat; during the meal they drank wine. A drunken man was sent out of the tavern at closing time, and it was up to him to get himself home, even though he fell down several times en route. If he was having too great a difficulty, some companions might lead him. If they were not around, the policeman or night watchman might act as guide. At his approach, the children hid and the wife became afraid. The villagers said: "Even an insane man runs away from the drunken." Sometimes in order to sober up the drunken man, people put a little urine or horse manure (substances rich with ammonia) in his mouth. The chief

complaint the women made against drinking was economic, The spending of money "for nothing," as they said.

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intelligentsia, when it came to the point dared not run counter to the old village sanctions against divorce.

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More often it was the husband who left the home. When he did and in rare cases interested himself in another woman, the villagers did all in their power to make him return. If he refused at first, they made him feel the indignation of public opinion, treating him as an outcast and sometimes going to the length of beating him. If he remained in the village, he had no choice but to go back to his wife. During the time he was away his wife also was put to shame, getting little sympathy from the general public. She knew, furthermore, that in case of a divorce both parties would be held guilty by the villagers, so she was willing to take her husband back and get along with him as best she could. A divorced man was considered to have loose morals; a divorced woman would have been thought thoroughly bad. There was thus a situation in which everyone was expected to marry, with no sanctioned way out once the marriage contract had been entered upon. Though such an attitude meant that unfortunate marriages had to drag on interminably, it also had the effect of forcing couples to adjust themselves to each other.

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Dragalevtsy seemed a curiosity indeed: a village in which marriage was little questioned, where there was practically no marital unfaithfulness, and no divorce. What were the reasons for the family stability? For one thing, life was still lived according to ancient customs. People only recently had begun to wonder about the age-old patterns which they had been following so faithfully. Some writers would call them the "dead hand of the past," others "the cake of custom." Whatever their name, they were conducive to a common understanding of the place of marriage. All the people expected the same things from life and from the home.

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Then, too, earning their living by farming was a joint enterprise. People got used to putting their shoulders to the wheel as a family group. In addition to what they all did together, women were supposed to do certain things, men other things, and children still other things. As long as every person did his part there was no friction, but quiet efficiency. Furthermore, the presence of a number of relatives made for greater stability. In the case of apparent misunderstanding

581 between a husband and wife, the proper relative intervened to suggest
593 a way out. Most of the husband's relatives were in the same locality
181 with him and could keep an eye on his behavior.
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One was not only tied closely to the husband's blood kin (*rodstvo*) but had to enter upon a formal relationship with one's in-laws. Families related by marriage felt close to each other, the intensity of the feeling depending upon the frequency with which the families met and the way the young couples got along. Ordinarily, however, the family of the bride was considered by the husband's parents to be as close, at times even closer, than blood relatives. For instance, if there was any sort of celebration to which guests were invited, the family of the bride was the first to be asked. One reliable informant estimated that ninety out of one hundred people in Dragalevtsy felt the force of *svatoustvo*, or this relationship springing up through intermarriage. The young people, who are usually so prone to make a break with the past, maintained it in all its vigor. Here was the way one young man explained the *svatoustvo*:

[582] "If my sister married some man in Simeonovo, even though I had never seen him before, his brother and sister would be my *svati*, and if I met them we would feel like cousins. I would never curse them or quarrel with them and would call their father '*dedo*' and their mother '*baba*,' the same names I use for my own grandparents. My parents and the parents of my new brother-in-law would likewise be *svati* and would treat one another reverently." Two brothers could not marry two sisters from another family, though there was no blood relationship, because the second couple were *svati* after the first couple married, and *svati* could not marry. Two brothers could marry two first cousins, but not two sisters. This feeling of closeness in families related by marriage did not stop with the husband and the wife, nor with the single in-law gained by each family. It included, as well, the in-law's parents and brothers and sisters with whom just dealings and proper behavior had always to prevail.

593 More than anything else, however, the shared activities of husband and wife developed an understanding which lasted through thick and thin. Some of these shared activities were the trip to market, the